

BATLEY TOWN CENTRE AUDIT 2004

FACT SHEET 6: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Introduction

This document, produced by Kirklees MC's Planning Service, is designed to provide supplementary information on environmental quality to accompany the 2004 Town Centre Audit for Batley (in A1 folded form). This is one of a series of Fact Sheets that contain detailed analysis of the indicators of town centre performance presented in the main publication.

Environmental quality: methodology

The town centre audit for Batley has involved a general assessment of its environmental strengths and weaknesses. The survey work was undertaken during August 2003, and covered 10 indicators of environmental quality. The exercise is based on a technique developed by URBED (the Urban and Economic Development Group). It updates the street by street environmental assessment undertaken as part of the 1999 Audit, reflecting in particular the changes that have taken place during the last 4 years.

11 streets in the town centre were assessed using the following indicators of environmental quality:

First impressions	Traffic intrusion
Cleanliness	Lighting/security
Building condition	Street furniture
Street condition	Signage/shop fronts
Townscape	Planting



Each street was credited with a score ranging from 5 for good through to 1 for poor, using a pro-forma for each of the 10 indicators. These were then totalled to give scores for each indicator, and for each street. The full results are presented overleaf (Figure 2), which also shows the changes in scores recorded since the previous assessment undertaken for the 1999 Town Centre Audit. The scores enable the town's environmental strengths to be identified, whilst also illustrating where problems exist. This is shown in the main audit publication.

When considering the overall environmental quality of the town it is important to recognise that some indicators are more important than others. To reflect this, the indicators were weighted, ranging from 3.0 for a street's overall appearance to

1.0 for planting. Weighted totals have been produced, along with weighted averages, because in some situations it is not possible to score all of the indicators for every street. The relative performance of individual streets in the town centre is illustrated in the main audit publication.



The assessment of environmental quality is a subjective exercise and for this reason the results of the survey should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it does provide a means of comparing the town centres performance over time to determine whether individual roads improve their score, or whether the town generally, can improve its rating on those indicators that are weak. This however, can only be done if the same indicators and the same weightings are used for subsequent environmental assessments.

Indicators of environmental quality

Over the last 4 years there has been a significant decline in the perceived environmental quality of Batley town centre. The last Audit in 1999 was completed at the end of the 7-year City Challenge Programme in which Batley Town Centre was subjected to several large environmental improvement programmes. It is likely that perceptions in 1999 were greatly influenced by the quality and 'newness' of the schemes, which by 2003 have aged, weathered and become tired in appearance.

First Impressions: This score relates to the general impression of the street to the visitor or shopper and reflects a broad combination of environmental indicators ranging from building condition and townscape through to colour and activity. It is an important indicator and is accordingly given high weighting.

Only 2 of the streets scored positively on this indicator, 1 less than in the 1999 Audit. Understandably, with its imposing buildings, Market Place secured the highest score. This location was a major beneficiary from environmental improvements under the City Challenge Programme, as was Commercial St (B), which was the only other location to score positively.

The lowest scoring location was St. James Street/Bus Station, which is consistent with the 1999 Audit. This area has had little

attention in terms of refurbishment and investment and its problems are highlighted by securing low scores across all the indicators. This is a major cause for concern for Batley as the Bus Station is often the first point of call for visitors to the town. However, Planning Permission has recently been granted for the redevelopment of the bus station to provide new facilities – 6 bus waiting bays, a covered waiting area and a retail unit. When implemented, this will dramatically change the overall appearance of this area.

Upper Commercial Street and Hick Lane also have low scores, with the remaining streets recording average scores. Cambridge Street has shown the greatest decline since 1999. However, this has largely been due to scaffolding screening the frontage of the Art College at the time of the 2003 survey.

Cleanliness: The survey examined street cleaning, evidence of vandalism, cleanliness of buildings and litter in landscaped areas. The time and day of the week are important factors in assessing cleanliness, as scores are likely to be influenced by how busy the town is and the programme of street cleaning.

Of the 11 streets surveyed, 9 achieved a good rating, and Alfreds way achieved an excellent score. St. James Street/Bus was the exception with a weak 'cleanliness' rating. Across the town as a whole cleanliness was the second highest scoring environmental indicator and was the only one to show an improvement from the 1999 Audit.

Building condition: This indicator relates to the level of building maintenance and upkeep. Generally speaking, Batley performed well on this indicator, with only St James Street/Bus Station receiving a negative rating. It is encouraging to note that many of the older buildings have well-maintained facades. Some of the locations with more modern buildings, such as Upper Commercial Street, scored less well. There are a number of buildings within the town centre that have fallen into a poor state of repair and have consequently lowered the scores in their respective areas. However, these are scattered and do not form any particular grouping or concentration.

Street condition: This indicator relates to the quality and condition of street surfaces. It is the highest scoring of all the indicators for Batley Town Centre and has maintained a consistent level since the 1999 Audit. The St James Street/Bus Station is the only location to receive a negative score, whilst Market Square, all of Commercial Street and the recently refurbished Alfreds Way all receive 'excellent' scores.

Townscape: This indicates the contribution made to the street scene by the quality of the built environment. Within Batley, townscape is only one of two indicators to receive a negative score. Since townscape is based on the design and siting of buildings and the layout of the street, it is unlikely that scores for this indicator would change significantly over time. However, demolition and building works associated with the Tesco redevelopment have influenced scores for this indicator at several locations within the vicinity of the site. Commercial Street (A) has been particularly prone to this effect and has also experienced lower scores on a series of other indicators as a result of the redevelopment works. The completion of the new Tesco store and streetscape works along the frontage vacated by the old store will help to redress the balance.

Notwithstanding the above, the town has a fine architectural heritage. Of particular value is the historic Market Square – bounded by the town's Victorian civic buildings. Environmental and townscape improvements undertaken during the City Challenge Programme emphasise Batley's rich industrial heritage. These qualities all contribute to the town's architectural character, creating a sense of place.

Traffic intrusion: This indicator relates to the levels of pedestrian/vehicular conflict evident on each of the 11 locations, along with the physical and visual intrusion that

occurs through vehicle movement, noise and car parking. In the 1999 Audit this element of the environmental assessment recorded the lowest score. Since then, there have been no significant changes to traffic management in and around Batley Town Centre, and hence this indicator continues to be one of the lowest scoring.



There are relatively few identified pedestrian crossing points within the town centre. This impedes the movement of shoppers. The traffic restrictions in operation in the Commercial Street area work well, but vehicular flow is fairly constant, and this together with parked vehicles does constitute an obstruction to pedestrian movement. 'Short cuts' taken to avoid the main street also make certain side streets and junctions unexpectedly busy (for example, the Well Lane junction with Commercial Street), which can also be a hindrance to pedestrian movement.

The highest level of traffic intrusion exists at the Bradford Road/Station Road/Hick Lane junction where the space is dominated by vehicular movement, which acts as a barrier to pedestrians. This is a particular issue due to the importance of maintaining the pedestrian linkage between the traditional town centre and the Mill Discount Department Store.

Security/Lighting: This indicator assesses features that contribute to the feeling of safety and security within Batley town centre. However, it is important not to consider this in isolation from other environmental indicators (for example, the general appearance of a street in terms of its life and vitality, or the condition of buildings and shop premises in terms of the level of vacancy, neglect and vandalism). All of these contribute to the perception of safety and security.

Batley scored reasonably well on this indicator, with none of the 11 locations receiving a poor rating. Not surprisingly the Bradford Road/Bus Station received the lowest score. The bleak appearance of the bus station with its high level lighting and boarded up properties is a particular 'black spot' in respect of concerns for safety and security.

The majority of shop premises exhibit roller shutters, which have now become the norm for most town centres. There were a few direct signs of vandalism and graffiti at the time of the survey. However it would appear that the increasing coverage of CCTV cameras in and around the town centre has had a positive effect on the perception of public safety.

Street furniture: This relates to the quality, availability and appropriateness of items such as lighting columns, seating and litter bins. All locations assessed in this survey, with the exception of Alfreds Way, Henrietta Street and St. James Street/Bus Station were given a rating of good, with Market Square receiving a rating of excellent. This high scoring is largely due to the quality of street furniture introduced in and around the town centre as part of the City Challenge programme.

St. James Street/Bus Station recorded a very low score due to the poor quality and/or absence of street furniture. Upgraded lighting columns have been installed in St. James Street but their impact is marred by the unsightly pedestrian barriers along the roadside, by the lighting columns in the bus station and by the poor quality of shelters in the bus station area.

Signage/Shop fronts: This includes the quality, appearance and obtrusiveness of signs, shop fronts, and advertising hoardings. The results of this survey show little change on the result of the 1999 Audit. Six of the 11 streets record a rating of good, but disappointingly the primary shopping area of Commercial Street (A&B) and Upper Commercial Street all record a rating of average. The results in these locations are governed largely by the impact of a lack of continuity in the shop fronts and fascia signs along the street. Many of the shopfronts have been developed and adapted with scant regard to the neighbouring properties and their shop signs pay little respect to the scale and design of the property. The same is true of Bradford Road/Station Road, which also records an average rating, where buildings of high architectural quality have been 'defaced' by modern shopfronts and fascia signs. Many of the shopfronts in this area have also fallen into disrepair, which has a significant impact on other indicators.

Notwithstanding the above, the town as a whole does not score poorly on this indicator. Traffic signs and advertisement hoardings, although present within the study area, are rarely dominant enough to be a significant detraction from the overall street scene.



Batley Library and Market Square

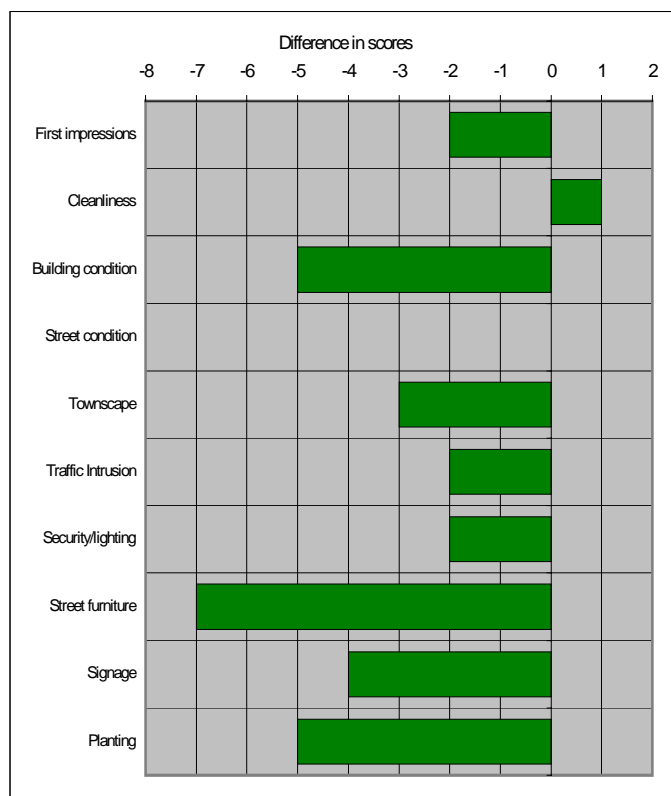
Planting: This relates to the quality of planting, its location and its appropriateness. There has been a significant reduction in the quality of planting since the 1999 Audit. Of significant concern is the drop in score for Commercial Street (A), Upper Commercial Street and Henrietta Street. The most recent assessment was undertaken at the end of a particularly hot summer, when many plants and shrub beds appeared to be overgrown, dry and tired in appearance. The low scores for planting in the main areas is due in part to a combination of the adverse conditions and general poor maintenance levels.

Some of town centre streets provide little opportunity for planting and as such it would be inappropriate to record either a positive or negative score.

Changes in environmental quality

As a whole, the results of the 2003 survey have shown a decline in the environmental quality of the town centre during the last 4 years. All but two of the indicators have shown a reduced score. Cleanliness recorded a slight improvement, whilst the street condition indicator has remained the same. Figure 1 shows the general changes in the scores achieved for each environmental indicator between the 1999 and 2003 assessments.

Figure 1: Changes in indicator scores 1999-2003



Street furniture has recorded the greatest reduction in score followed by building condition and planting. The low scores in these 3 indicators suggests that the town has suffered a certain amount of neglect and lack of maintenance. Considerable resources were pumped into the town as part of the City Challenge Programme, which ended in 1999. However, since then, the town has experienced a decline in the quality of the environment in certain locations.

The perception of environmental quality has also been adversely affected by the demolition and building works taking place on the Tesco site at the time of the 2003 assessment. The scores awarded for a number of indicators such as first impressions and building condition could have been influenced by the appearance of the building site from several locations around the town. Once building works are completed, and the 'gap' left by the removal of the old Tesco store is appropriately treated, the general environment of these areas is likely to improve again. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the proposed improvement scheme for the bus station area will also assist in raising Batley town centre's environmental quality.



'Finger-post' signage in the town centre

Figure 2: Environmental assessment full results (2003)

Street name	First impressions	Cleanliness	Building condition	Street condition	Townscape	Traffic Intrusion	Security/lighting	Street furniture	Signage	Planting	2003 Weighted Score	Change 99-03
Weighting	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.5	2.0	1.0		-
Market Place											26	+0.5
Commercial Street (A)											13.5	-10.5
Commercial Street (B)											13	-8.0
Upper Commercial Street											2	-2.5
Branch Road											15	-7.0
Henrietta Street											6	-7.5
Cambridge Street											16.5	-6.0
Hick Lane											5	-7.5
Alfreds Way											12.5	+2.0
St James Street / Bus Station											-29	+1.5
Bradford Road / Station Road											4.5	-6.5
2003 Indicator score	-2	10	7	13	-1	0	6	7	3	3	-	-
Change 99-03	-2	1	-5	0	-3	-2	-2	-7	-4	-5		
Total Score											85	

Key:

+2		Excellent
+1		Good
0		Average
-1		Weak
-2		Poor

Commercial Street (A) = 1-25 and 2-22 Commercial Street (south eastern end towards Hick Lane)
 Commercial Street (B) = 28-84 and 27-97 Commercial Street (north western end towards Branch Road)

Although every care and effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the data and statements contained in this publication, Planning Services does not accept responsibility for any errors or inaccuracies which may have occurred therein.

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